

LA

WEEKLY

JANUARY 03-09, 2025 | VOL. 37 / NO. 09 | LAWEEKLY.COM

ANGELICA NWANDU: THE HUMBLE VOICE INSIDE
THE SHADE ROOM

BY MICHELE STUEVEN

DEPECHE MODE'S 'VIOLATOR': THE BEAUTY OF ELEVATED PORN MUSIC AND ABSTRACT SOUNDSCAPES



COURTESY WARNER MUSIC GROUP

BY BRETT CALLWOOD

Ben Kaplan of dark synth-pop band NoNight told us about his love for a bonafide classic from some likeminded souls.

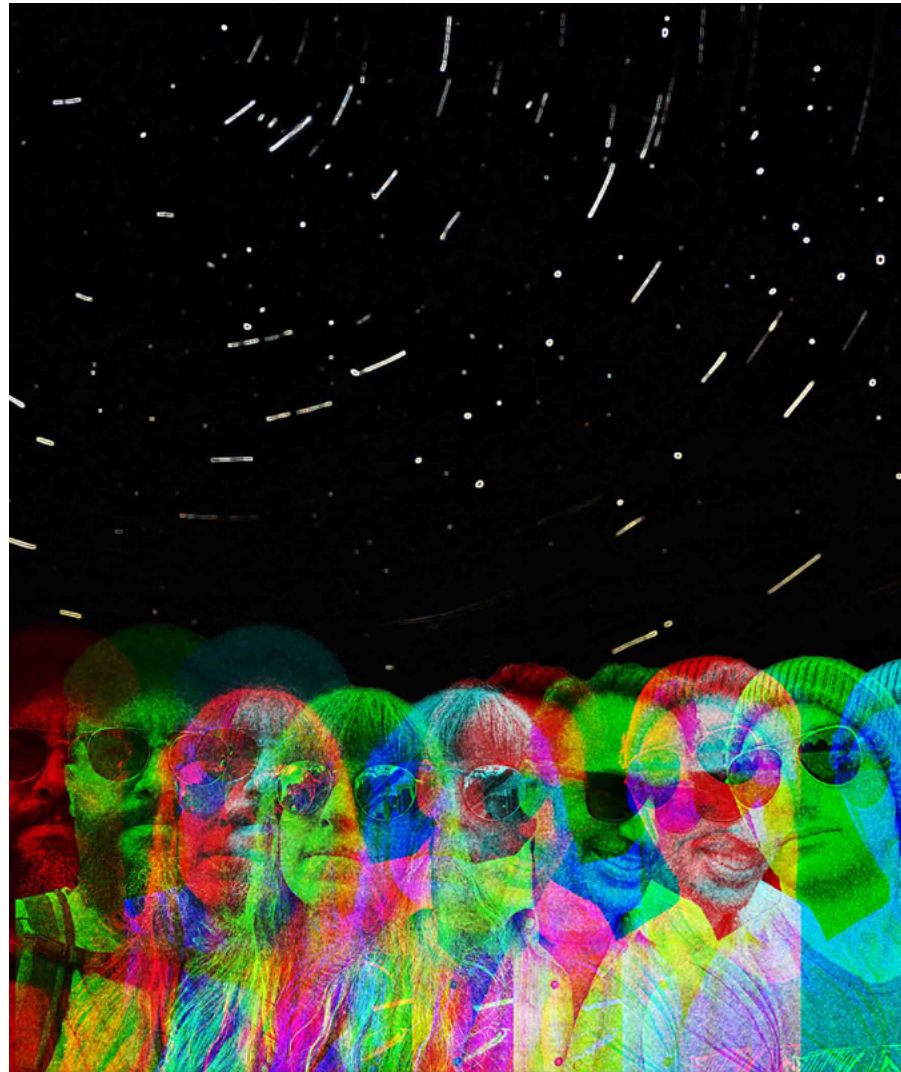
Ben Kaplan: When Justin Russo and I started writing the new No-Night record, NN3, we kept leaning into a dark dance/synth-pop vibe and immediately I started listening to Depeche Mode for inspiration, specifically their 1990 album *Violator*.

The title really says it all for me. This is a record that oozes sexuality and sleaze. An album full of late-night driving songs and dim, dance-floor bangers. Every tune on this thing is like elevated porno music to me, in the best way possible. It has arguably the biggest DM song of all time on it with "Enjoy The Silence," but only when you listen to the album do you get the extra two minutes of abstract soundscapes at the end. I bet most people don't even know about that!

"Personal Jesus" is another all-time classic on this along with "World In My Eyes," "Policy of Truth" and "Waiting for the Night." Just wild that so many famous songs were all on one album.

Sandwiched between these massive hits are deep-cut gems like "Blue Dress" and "Clean." You need weird off-kilter songs to make it an interesting album otherwise *Violator* basically sounds like a greatest hits collection. There's tons of other amazing Depeche Mode songs, but *Violator* stands out to me as their greatest full work.

NoNight's "Never Say Goodbye" single is out now. [LA](#)



NoNight in the night

COURTESY NONIGHT

CONTENTS



ON THE COVER:

Image courtesy Joyce Charat

Cover design by Jewel Baek

MUSIC..... 2

Depeche Mode, *Violator* is a lesson in late-night synth that is filled with hits.

BY BRETT CALLWOOD

ENTERTAINMENT 3

Bob Dylan biopic pulls out all the Dylan tropes we know and love.

BY CHAD BYRNES

FOOD - WHAT'S POPPING UP .. 4-5

Traditional tea time and a Ghirardelli storefront and ice cream shop.

BY MICHELE STUEVEN

CULTURE 6-8

Angelica Nwandu finds her spotlight in the shade.

BY MICHELE STUEVEN

CLASSIFIED..... 8

LA WEEKLY

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 FOR STREET MEDIA



'A COMPLETE UNKNOWN' FOLLOWS BOB DYLAN'S 1960S JOURNEY FROM THE VILLAGE TO NEWPORT

BY CHAD BYRNES



COURTESY SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES

One of the joys of James Mangold's *A Complete Unknown*, the unapologetically glamorous portrait of Bob Dylan, is its unbridled celebration of creativity and music. Although a little tidily sketched, Mangold creates an atmosphere that's so vibrant and infectious, the movie simply overshadows historical details devotees of the Sixties singer/songwriter might hold dear. Unlike 2007's *I'm Not There*, in which director Todd Haynes deconstructs Dylan's mystique by having several actors depict his incarnations over the course of his varied career, Mangold is only interested in the artist's journey from his arrival in New York City, in 1961, to his controversial performance at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival, where he played electric guitar to an audience of horrified folk music fans. Imagine if Taylor Swift suddenly broke into a few death metal tunes for an arena of adoring Swifties, basically melting their faces with some volcanic riffs, and you'll get the idea of the kind of impact this moment had.

Even if you're not a fan of Mangold's approach to the material, which can be a little grandiose and affected at times, his passion for the material is palpable and focused. Instead of dwelling on the specifics of Dylan's rise to fame, which was intense and rapid, Mangold is interested in how Dylan's journey addresses themes such as obsession, community

pressure, and artistic integrity. Mangold leaves the unraveling of Dylan's mystique to other filmmakers. As he is portrayed by a splendid Timothée Chalamet, you might not leave the theater knowing Bob Dylan, the man, but you'll come closer to understanding Bob Dylan, the artist.

We meet Dylan when he arrives in New York City in 1961 with a dilapidated suitcase and an acoustic guitar. He immediately finds his idol, Woody Guthrie (Scoot McNairy), who is in hospice care for Huntington's disease; sitting at Guthrie's bedside is Pete Seeger (a captivating Edward Norton). Dylan introduces himself to the two unsuspecting men before playing "A Song to Woody." With his gravelly voice and baby-faced enthusiasm, Guthrie and Seeger know they're witnessing the next wave of the folk genre they helped to create.

Pretty soon, Dylan is playing in Greenwich Village clubs, where he meets those who'll become instrumental to his rise to fame. First, he meets Joan Baez (Monica Barbaro), a fellow singer and poet who's already been on the cover of *Time* magazine. He also falls in love and moves in with Sylvie Russo (Elle Fanning), who's based on Dylan's ex Suze Rotolo. With the help of manager Albert Grossman (Dan Fogler), Dylan records his 1962 debut, which features mostly folk and blues covers. Although the record company thinks

he's too young to offer anything original, Dylan hides in his apartment subsisting on scraps, smoking cigarettes, and crafting legendary songs.

The movie makes clear that before he became famous, Dylan created a persona that he utilized both onstage and in his personal life. He's both foppish and sardonic, but also abrasive and mistrustful. He refuses to give anyone a glimpse into his interior life. This is especially frustrating to his girlfriend, Sylvie, while occasional lover Joan Baez merely studies him as if she's breaking a code. As Chalamet plays him, Dylan will go to great lengths to keep the real Robert Zimmerman (his given name) from seeing the light of day. In doing so, he's creating his own mystique. Whether Dylan's transformation is marked by fear or courage is open to debate.

As Dylan's star rises, exposing folk music to a wider world, the same community that initially promoted his talents begins feeling like a noose around his neck. Dylan won't be boxed in, not even by those who helped him achieve success. Co-written by Mangold and Jay Cocks and based on Elijah Wald's 2015 book *Dylan Goes Electric!: Newport, Seeger, Dylan, and the Night That Split the Sixties*, the movie depicts Dylan as an artist with laser-beam focus. Anyone who exists on the periphery of his art, even if he loves them, is susceptible to his apathy. The only person who seems to understand him is fellow minstrel and friend Johnny Cash (Boyd Holbrook), who's in the process of breaking with his own, Nashville-based coterie.

Although the film lacks the dramatic thrust and discernible character arc of Mangold's other biopic, *Walk the Line*, it's still an engrossing examination of talent and the pitfalls of fame. Tensions simmer in Dylan's paranoia about being pigeonholed by the folk community, the record companies, and even his lovers. His need to create is urgent, leading to friendship with musician Bob Neuwirth (Will Harrison), whose unbridled, footloose influence no doubt inspired Dylan to break new ground and, as the film suggests, probably led to the recording of the studio album *Highway 61 Revisited*. The plot is like a Sixties bohemian version of *Amadeus*, where a misunderstood genius is constantly commodified, critiqued, and envied by everyone in his orbit, which also leads to Dylan exhibiting a dark side — he can be obnoxious, self-centered, and sullen. While Baez is willing to play popular favorites to the crowd, Dylan scoffs and walks offstage, humiliating her in the process. Mangold frames Dylan's journey into the bowels of celebrity with a curious anxiety, ratcheting up his nervousness and mistrust as the world clamors for his attention. Tonally, it's a slow burn, which culminates at

the 1965 Newport Folk Festival, where Dylan plugs in an electric guitar and turns his back on the folksters (and his devoted audience), cementing his legend as an independent artist who will always carve his own path, no matter the risk.

Unfortunately, the movie also relies on manufactured and hokey sequences to create its 1960s New York City setting. You'd think that after *Walk the Line* was so heavily parodied in *Walk Hard: The Dewey Cox Story*, Mangold might avoid worn-out tropes of the standard biopic. But Mangold is a Hollywood director with a capital "H" (his last film was the abysmal *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny*), and his tendency to shovel the bloat comes with the program. Take the sequence where citizens are fleeing the city during the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the camera swoops into a club where Dylan is playing "Masters of War" at that very moment. Uh-huh. This is one of a few contextual sequences that are so didactic and forced, you almost expect *Forrest Gump* to appear and remind us that it's the Sixties. Luckily, the story recovers from these pitfalls and gets back to the business of Bob Dylan, and not world affairs.

Hyperbolic excursions aside, the film moves at a brisk, rhythmic pace. And the performances occasionally lift the material to transcendent heights. Barbaro, as Baez, exudes a tenderness that gives the movie an appealing, romantic texture. And although her character is underwritten, Fanning is equally good. But this is Timothée Chalamet's movie. He gives Dylan defiance, humor, and enough abstraction to keep his mystique intact. Chalamet performs nearly a dozen songs during the film, finding his own groove instead of simply imitating Dylan's famous growl.

For Dylanologists, *A Complete Unknown* will play like a sanitized version of his greatest hits. They're not wrong. This is far from an authentic or comprehensive depiction of one of the most elusive, madcap artists this country has produced. Although the movie's period re-creation is visually impressive, the Coen brothers' *Inside Llewyn Davis* does a much better job of capturing the vigorous, soul-crushing struggles of a street musician during that era. Mangold needed to apply one more layer of dirt to legitimize Dylan's experience.

Still, Mangold's interests go beyond telling Bob Dylan's story. The movie has a curiosity about the convergence of talent and celebrity, and the challenges that poses to a scruffy kid from Duluth, Minnesota. In charting the hero's journey into a world where people compromise their talents and sell their wares at a cheap price, Mangold honors a man who refused to do so. The final result might not match the complexity of Dylan himself, but it effectively pulls you into his entangled universe. **A-**

WHAT'S UP POPPING UP

Urasenke Tea Ceremony And A New Ghirardelli Ice Cream Shop

BY MICHELE STUEVEN

The timeless elegance of the Japanese tea ceremony is part of the “[Masters of Carpentry: Melding Forest, Skill and Spirit](#)” exhibition at [Japan House Los Angeles](#). On Tuesday, Jan. 7, and Tuesday, Jan. 14, the gallery will transform into an intimate setting for Urasenke Tea Ceremony pop-up ceremonies alongside

one of the exhibition highlights, a full-scale reproduction of the historic Sa-an Teahouse. January is National Hot Tea Month and the ceremonies offer an afternoon of cultural insight and peaceful reflection. Originally designed in the late 16th century by tea master Sen no Rikyu, the Sa-an teahouse provides a space to immerse in the rich and diverse



COURTESY THE LIDO THEATER



COURTESY JAPAN HOUSE LOS ANGELES

heritage of the centuries-old tea ceremony known as chanoyu or chadō (the way of tea.)

[The Lido Theater](#), Newport Beach's historic and recently restored movie landmark has launched the Café Pop-Up Experience, open daily from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. The café features a variety of freshly prepared menu items alongside an assortment of fresh-baked goods daily. Watch a complimentary movie in the theater in front of the big screen or at a table on the patio under the marquee while noshing on a Mortadella breakfast sandwich, classic grilled cheese, turkey melt, or Big City Red hot dog. Grab-and-go selections include tuna or chicken salad with mixed

greens, in a sherry vinaigrette or market granola parfait with mixed berries.

[Ghirardelli](#) has opened the doors of its first [Santa Monica Chocolate and Ice Cream Shop](#) on Ocean Ave. near the pier. The new shop marks the brand's fourth Southern California brick-and-mortar location and showcases the brand's history in chocolate, sundae making (including the daily-made hot fudge), and other fountain and bakery favorites like milkshakes, hot chocolate, brownies, and cookies. The 3900 square foot space weaves together elements reflective of the shop in San Francisco with nods to Santa Monica with indoor and outdoor seating. [LA](#)



COURTESY GHIRARDELLI

CULTURE

ANGELICA NWANDU: THE HUMBLE VOICE INSIDE THE SHADE ROOM

BY MICHELE STUEVEN

If you've ever spent any time in *The Shade Room* on Instagram, you know what a powerhouse the cultural information hub is to its more than 29 million followers, known as roommates, which churns out Black celebrity news on

an almost hourly basis.

Touting exclusives like Dwight Howard addressing Royce Reed's threatening comments against him to thirst traps from Saweetie, *The Shade Room* is a bold space for the Black community with a

record-breaking amount of engagement from its trusting roomies.

But behind all the bravado is the soft and humble voice of its owner and creator, Angelica Nwandu. A graduate of Loyola Marymount University in Westchester, the Nigerian-born beauty has also spent much time in the school of hard knocks.

"My earliest memories of my childhood were in Inglewood, California," Nwandu tells *LA Weekly*. "My parents were immigrants from Nigeria who came here in the late 80's. I lost my mother to domestic violence at the hands of my father. From there I went into foster care and pretty much lived in every area in Los Angeles County. We just kept moving around."

"Let's say I made it through. I had a lot of traumatic experiences in foster care. Recently, my four siblings and I are part of a class action lawsuit against the Department of Child and Family Services because they just ignored a lot of sexual, physical, and mental abuse that occurred in foster care. Some of the social workers are overburdened with cases, and I get that, but the result is that a lot of children are suffering in the system."

Undeterred by the trauma, Nwandu chooses to look back at her foster care experience as a positive one and says she wouldn't be who she is now if she hadn't gone through that adversity.

"I look back at the good things I learned, like how to be adaptable," she says. "I had to move in with different families and had to learn how to adapt. It allowed me to pick up different experiences and cultures. We lived in an eclectic bunch of homes — from impoverished to Bel-Air. When Angelina Jolie was adopting children, she took us in. I credit her for showing me that you can have more in life. Overall I'm grateful for my story."

Her story and the shooting star that became *The Shade Room* started 10 years ago.

Nwandu was a legacy applicant at LMU. She had older cousins who came from Nigeria and went there, and although she was put on the waiting list, she was bound and determined to get in. She wrote a letter to the president, and within a week, she was accepted.

"I never actually saw myself in the media, ever," says Nwandu, who has the grace and stature reminiscent of Jolie,



Angelica Nwandu

COURTESY JOYCE CHARAT



Shade Room Executive Team

COURTESY ANGELICA NWANDU



Angelica Nwandu

COURTESY JOYCE CHARAT

currently starring in *Maria* on Netflix. “When I went to LMU I wanted to be a screenwriter. I always saw myself writing scripts and working in film and the movie industry. But my family was very strict about what they wanted us to study. It would have to be something like engineering, accounting or nursing. So originally, my degree was in accounting.”

She got a job as a bookkeeper at Motorcycle Performance Services at \$13 an hour while still taking elective classes like screenwriting at LMU with teachers that included Hollywood heavyweight Philip Messina. Sure enough, one of the scripts she co-wrote with actress Jordana Spiro made it to the Sundance Film Festival, winning an award. *Night Comes On* was inspired by Nwandu’s life in foster care.

Between the urging of friends and her loathing of accounting, she quit the motorcycle gig and started experiment-

ing with Instagram. She first opened up a boutique on the platform and tried to sell clothes. Juju’s Closet, named after her little sister, failed within six months.

“I was unemployed, and had no money in the bank,” says Nwandu. “I’d always tell my friend what was happening in the media every day and the friend said, why don’t you just start your own media company? That night I started researching ideas. It was just at the time when the blogging and www. industry was dying and sites were closing down. Social media was just starting to disrupt it. So I opened up an Instagram page and I’ll tell you from that first day I just knew this was going to be something big.”

“On the first day, I blogged 24 hours directly to Instagram, short little captions and a picture,” she says. “That first day I got 300 followers. By the end of the first week, it had 10,000 followers. It was

growing so fast because it was just different. People were used to stuff being published directly to people’s feeds, and the people we were covering were already IG famous. At the time, you couldn’t go to websites to find out what was happening with influencers because they weren’t seen as celebrities. I was blogging about them and getting their audiences to come to us to find out what was happening behind the scenes of the influencers. It was something new that attracted a lot of people early on.”

She called it *The Shade Room* because shade was a word being used heavily in the Black community as offhand comments. But for Nwandu, it was really the truth room. As she puts it, sometimes the truth is misconstrued as shade, and it became a forum for brutally honest opinions.

She went from pushing out content 24 hours a day solo with no sleep, to the me-

dia beast she runs now with 40 employees, which includes editorial, news, video and website teams. They work 40-hour shifts, open at 4 a.m. Eastern time and close around 9 p.m. Eastern time.

Because Nwandu listens keenly to her roomies, there have been plenty of pivots during that meteoric rise.

“We started posting politics in 2020,” she says. “It happened after the George Floyd protests. We listened to our audience a lot, and during that time, we tried to continue posting celebrity news, but they wanted to talk about George Floyd. There was so much happening in our community that we wanted to focus on social justice. So we had to pivot. The writers kind of panicked and said, ‘Wait, we’re not trained for this kind of writing.’ Everybody had journalism degrees, but we trained them in celebrity news. They had to pivot completely to politics

and social justice. So, we learned along the way.

“At that time I was under the idea that we had to learn whichever way our audience learned,” she says. “I mistakenly assumed that Black people were all Democrats. So we learned that way. As time went on, I noticed that in black culture, there are a lot of conservative ideals. A lot of them may identify as a Democrat, but when I hear their opinions on different issues, it’s conservative. You talk to them long enough and plenty of people have those conservative-leaning talking points. So when 2023 came around, we began to open the floodgates and said hey, we’re not here to influence you one way or the other, we’re just going to put the information out there and allow you to make your own decisions and I honestly think that’s how the media should go. We need to trust our audience to make their own decisions on who to

vote for and give them unbiased information from each party.”

Presidential candidate Kamala Harris sat down and talked to *The Shade Room*. An invite was also extended to Donald Trump, who declined.

The Nigerian native’s ascent is just getting fiercer as 2025 kicks in. There will be short-form movies, festivals, products, and more on the horizon this year.

“When I think of a matriarch, a gracious soul, timeless mainstream media, resilience, inspiration, and beauty, it’s Angelica,” Beyond Our Kin CEO Ava Walker tells *LA Weekly*. “It was truly a special moment for our organization to honor her at our luncheon recently. Beyond Our Kin is a nonprofit organization that empowers foster youth, which Angelica helped start as the first donor. Since then she continuously helps make a tremendous impact in the lives of foster youth.” 📺



Angelica Nwandu

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EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION

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